

## Meeting the Challenge of COVID-19

[Music Playing]

Brenda Hewitt: Head Start is a vital and essential part of a child's life, and part of the community. Sometimes these families need more assistance in order to be able to help the child. As a result of alcohol abuse, as a result of a number of things that are impacting their lives.

Toscha Blalock: So, the opioid epidemic is really hitting urban families. Families that are already dealing with a number of struggles.

Kaitlan Baston: So, when COVID hit, of course, as a physician I, like many other people, were worried about what would happen medically. But I will tell you that I personally was much more worried about the socioeconomic impact it would have in our society.

Maria Page: COVID has been very challenging for many of our communities.

Brenda: It really has challenged our families socially, emotionally, financially.

Kaitlan: I knew kind of watching it come, and watching things shut down, that it would have a dramatic widening of the income gap that already exists in the United States. And any time in our history that we've seen an increase in unemployment rates, we've seen an increase in substance use.

Maria: For many of the head of households the question was, "How am I going to feed my family?" And also, "How am I going to maintain my sobriety?"

Matthew Stefanko: We're certainly seeing, or hearing anecdotally, about increases in alcohol use. Is not only does COVID create social distancing that needs to happen, which is a new phenomenon for people. The idea that you can't go and hug a loved one or be next to somebody that you haven't seen for a few weeks. You take that and you pair that with someone losing their job; you combine those two things together, and you can see how that creates so much challenge for people.

Kaitlan: And for my clients with substance use disorders that is often magnified. If one person loses a job, or there's a huge economic challenge, that can completely destabilize a family that was doing really well. I think of treatment for substance use disorders as a hierarchy of needs. So, if somebody doesn't have their basic needs met – if they can't eat, if they don't have a safe place to sleep, if they don't have housing – they're not going to get to the next level of care.

Maria: A lot of people say, "Well, I'm just an addiction specialist, and I just do addiction counseling." Reality now, there is no normal. Our job is to be a little more aggressive, a little more intense in searching those resources for the clients and the families.

Brenda: So, remember that when you get frustrated, to keep doing what you do. And to keep fighting for our children and families because we are the voice that really makes a difference in their lives.